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ABSTRACT

Classroom observation is an integral part of teacher preparation. The observer must enter the classroom with a frame-of-reference: knowledge of the teacher's goals and objectives, awareness of the climate of the classroom, and knowledge of the discipline. Observation forms to objectively record classroom interaction, assess the learning climate, and to profile the teacher's role in the process can be used along with analysis of the student's academic performance to indicate the teacher's success in attaining goals and objectives. (A model for classroom observation which incorporates these and additional specific observational techniques is provided.) (JMF)

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CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CRITERIA AND TECHNIQUES

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STATEMENT

In order to know what is happening in any given classroom there is a need to observe the education process in action.

But just seeing what is happening in the classroom, at any given point in time, is not enough! There is a need to go into the classroom with a frame-of-reference; an understanding of *what is* and *what should be happening* - an understanding that is steeped in an experiential background.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

When entering a classroom there is a need for the observer to be knowledgeable regarding the teacher's *goals and objectives*. There is a need for all parties involved, including the students, to know what is supposed to happen as the result of an educational experience and how the experience(s) is (are) to effect or change the learner.

The observer should also pay attention to the *climate* of the classroom. Knowing the instructional goals and objectives, the observer must determine whether the *climate* of the classroom enhances and/or supports the goals/objectives and their attainment.

Attention should also be paid to the pedagogical design of instruction. Has the teacher selected instructional

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techniques which will compliment goals, objectives and enhance their attainment by students.

How well is the teacher managing the classroom? Is the teacher successfully attending to the mechanics of teaching (e.g., activities, discipline, organization)?

Does the teacher provide for student interaction with a variety of instructional materials which have an effect on student awareness, exposure and experiences - both direct and vicarious activities?

Does the teacher have a strategy for assessing the instructional value of planned activities for students? Has the teacher created a feedback loop - for purposes of determining the worth of a planned student endeavor?

In order to identify the above-mentioned observation criteria and to adequately assess their successful implementation, the observer needs to possess personal experiences; the *frame-of-reference*. There is no substitute for experience - and in the case of observation it is critical. (See Diagram I)

OBSERVATION TECHNIQUES

Many objective observations can be compiled to produce an evaluation - whether it be formative (on-going) or summative (end-of-activity).

The process of observation encompasses several strategies and techniques.

As stated before, the critical basis of classroom observation is a knowledge of the teacher's goals and objectives. Without such a knowledge, the observer cannot adequately perceive that which is planned to happen in the classroom. If, for example, the teacher's goal is to involve students directly in a variety of learning experiences but students become passive - rather than active - learners, and if the observer is not aware of this goal - it becomes an impossible task for the observer to compare proposed process (student direct involvement in a variety of learning experiences) with product (passive rather than active students).

Observation forms (e.g., the Flanders Interaction Analysis) can be used to objectively record classroom interaction, assess the learning climate, and to profile the teacher's role in the instructional process. The value of an observation form is that the observer becomes a non-involved recorder. The observer is not required to make biased judgements of teacher/student performance(s) but rather documents that which is observed - that which takes place in the classroom at any given point in time.

If the observer has managed a classroom and has worked directly with students then he/she brings to the classroom setting a personal/professional frame-of-reference. This frame-of-reference forms the context in which the observer

views that which is happening and anticipates that which will (should) happen next. The observer's frame-of-reference forms the basis of expectation and for the evaluation and critical feedback to the teacher.

Many times the most important basis for observation of the teacher and his/her classroom learning climate is to observe the product; that is, the student(s) and related activities. What types of activities are students involved with? Do the students take an active role in their learning or are they passive bystanders? Do students have the opportunity to apply learned skills in participatory activities? What do students do with amassed knowledge?

Student's academic performance may also be an indicator of teacher success in goals/objectives attainment. Again, it is critical that the observer be made thoroughly aware of the teacher's purpose in designing a particular classroom organization (e.g., small work groups, straight rows of desks), selecting a specific pedagogical strategy (e.g., lecture, out of classroom observations, and classroom work groups), utilizing certain materials in the instructional process (e.g., books, films and filmstrips, study kits), and encompassing a variety of student learning activities into an instructional design.

In addition to *other's* observation for purposes of evaluation, the classroom teacher should be directly involved in a process or strategy of *self* evaluation. There are several

ways by which the teacher can assess personal strengths and weaknesses.

1. Rating scale(s).
2. Videotapes/audio tapes.
3. Assessment of goals/objectives attainment.
4. Assessment of student performance in assigned tasks.

The importance of *other's* observation(s) by fellow professionals should not be overlooked! Many times an individual is too close to the *action* and cannot see strengths and weaknesses. Often times other teachers can identify accomplishments and shortcomings and can convey this information to the subject of the observation(s) in a professional format. The teacher supervisor (e.g., the department chairman, curriculum coordinator, teacher in-service education director, or building level administrator) should see to it that *other's* observational feedback to a teacher is conducted on a professional plane; that observation comments and critiques of performance are aimed at professional assessment instead of personality criticism. (See Diagram II)

A MODEL FOR CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

In order to properly assess classroom activities, the observer must establish an operational construct. The purpose for this conceptual construct is the creation of a modus operandi; an operational procedure which is applicable

to any classroom and to any given subject matter area of instruction. (See Diagram III)

When observing teachers, students and classroom environments, the observer must keep in mind the fact that while there are basic tenets of the instructional/learning process which can be observed and investigated overtime (e.g., intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, knowledge to be learned, an inquiry process) consideration must be given to the *peculiarities* and uniqueness of each discipline of knowledge (e.g., *technical* vocabulary, skills, body of knowledge, methods of inquiry).

For example, if entering a classroom to observe a social studies class the observer must be aware of the content, the skills and the activities with which students will interact. While the social studies methods of inquiry might closely approximate and resemble those of the sciences - they most likely will differ from those used in mathematics and language arts. Again, the observer's *frame-of-reference* (the experiential background) is a critical factor effecting his/her ability to comprehend that which is happening in the classroom - and how well it is being done.

Because each discipline of knowledge an intellectual (discourse) is a specialized area of learning, there is a need for the classroom observer to be knowledgeable in <u>all</u> the areas of discourse with which he/she interacts. In the field of classroom observation - and teacher evaluation - there is no place for the *jack-of-all-trades*. The observer

must be a professional; one who is equipped with a frame-of-reference, understands the nature and structure of several disciplines of knowledge, and clearly understands the teacher's instructional goals and objectives.

This is to say that there is a crying need for building level and central office administrators to upgrade their *expertise* not only in observational techniques but also in the several disciplines of knowledge. Their *frame-of-reference* differs from that of the classroom teacher - and even from that of the objective observer. The administrator has certain instructional goals and objectives which may differ from those of the classroom teacher. In fact, the two sets of goals and objectives might well be in conflict one with the other. The educational philosophies in which the different sets of goals and objectives are steeped may, in fact, be incongruent. Thus, a conflict situation exists.

If desired, conflict resolution can only be achieved when there is greater harmony between the sets of goals and objectives. One way this can happen is for the teacher(s) and the administrator(s) to sit down - discuss - and agree upon mutually desirable goals and objectives which are based upon a congruent philosophy of education.

Administrators, as well as teachers, should become involved in in-service training programs which emphasize familiarity with disciplines of knowledge as well as indoctrination into administrative principles and techniques.

Only by understanding the construct, content and principles of several disciplines of knowledge can the administrator adequately and properly observe - comprehend - and evaluate classroom activities and teacher performance.

DIAGRAM I: INSTRUCTIONAL CRITERIA

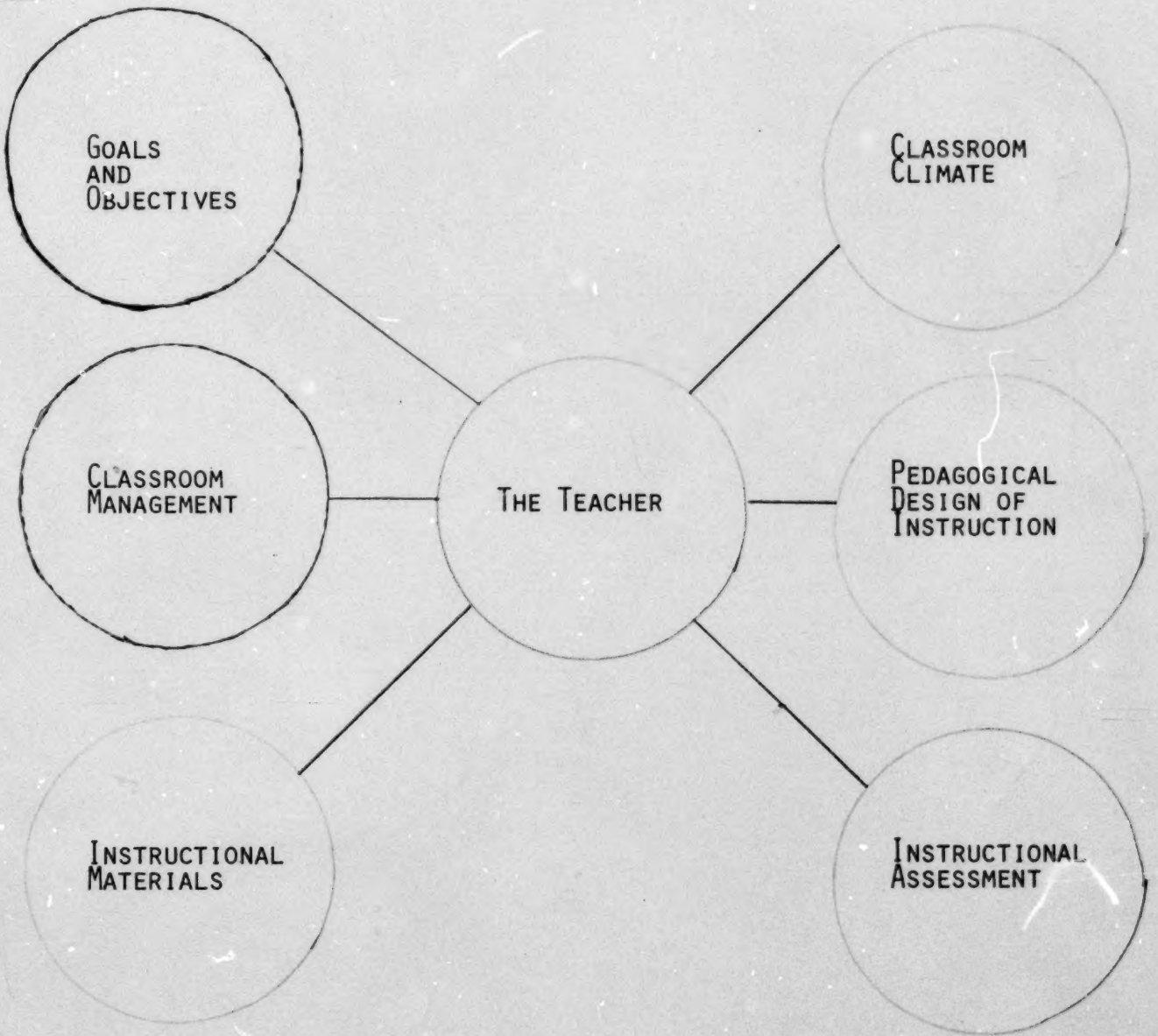

Diagram II: The Process of Observation

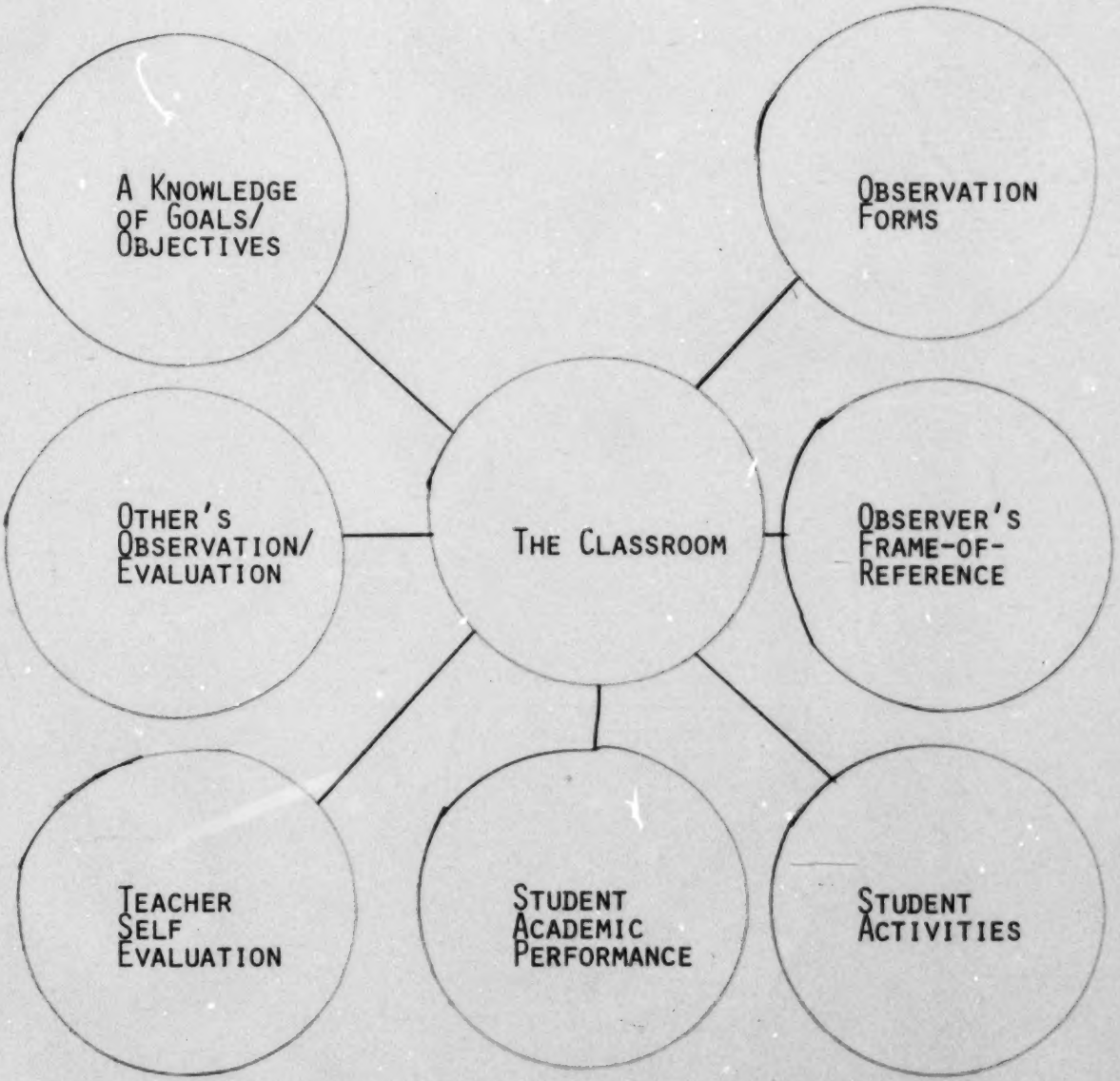

DIAGRAM III: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION MODEL